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ABSTRACT

Career planning is the most critical ingredient in developing a nation's primary resource, its workers. A 1988 Gallup Poll showed that 62 percent of U.S. workers had no career goal when they began their first job, and more than 50 percent felt they were in the wrong job. The same results probably could be applied to Canada. Career planning skills are not instinctive. Young people and adults need to be taught basic skills they can use in evaluating their needs, identifying their options, and making good career choices. Job changing is thought to cost business and government in Canada about $7.5 billion in costs and lost wages per year. Lost productivity is no doubt the greatest economic cost of inappropriate career decisions. However, Canadian youth receive little help in making these decisions. Counselors are involved with many other problems besides career planning. A new vision is required, one that sees career planning as a community responsibility, rather than just an educational, or worse, a counselor responsibility. More attention must be paid to the career-related developmental needs of clients across the full spectrum of community service agencies. People must be taught how to locate and process information that has personal relevance. Community goals should be set to reduce school dropout rates, increase productivity of area firms, and increase career awareness. Such programs will ensure brighter futures for the citizens and the communities. (KC)

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Career Planning: Developing The Nation's Primary Resource

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The Challenge

The bottom-line ingredient in economic growth is the nation's most important primary resource, its people. With increasing global trade competition forcing firms to seek ways to increase productivity through technological innovation, and to develop new products and services, future growth will depend more than ever on a highly skilled, flexible labour force. As a result, major transformations are occurring in the jobs people are being expected to perform. Regular change and increasing complexity will characterize most of the occupational spectrum in the future. Adaptability, and higher levels and broader ranges of skills will increasingly be demanded of workers.

It is estimated that of all the jobs created between now and the year 2000, two thirds will require more than high school graduation. Almost half of these will require over five years of post-secondary education and training. But our labour force is becoming older and less adaptable, and the majority of today's workers do not have the education and training the labour force of the near future will require. Seventy-five percent of the current labour force will still be employed in the year 2000. Therefore, intensive retraining efforts will be necessary.

Over 30 percent of youth are dropping out of high school, and only 35 percent are pursuing their education beyond high school. Of the 17 percent who enter university programs, less than half graduate. At the same time fewer people, especially youth, are now entering our labour force. While the labour force grew by about 300,000 people a year in the 1970's, the forecast for the 1990's is about 180,000 people per year.

The majority of people now working may be in the wrong jobs. A 1988 national Gallup Poll revealed that sixty-two percent of U.S. workers had no career goal when they began their first job, and over 50 percent feel they are in the wrong jobs. Only 8 percent of the working adults surveyed in a 1988 Harris Poll believed they were in the most appropriate jobs for their talents and aspirations. There is no reason to believe that the results of similar surveys in Canada would be significantly different.

Career planning skills are obviously not instinctive. Young people and adults need to be taught basic skills they can use in evaluating their needs, identifying their options and making good career choices. These creative reasoning skills will be as important to workers as basic literacy and numeric skills.

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In the past Canada has been able to sell an abundance of natural resources to establish its position as a major trading nation, and to enjoy one of the best standards of living in the world. This will not suffice in the world of the 21st century. To maintain or improve prosperity in the future, our labour force will require more people with more skills. Current workers will need to acquire new skills. More young people must acquire appropriate levels of education and training. Our labour force will require the full and equitable participation of women who have developed a broader range of skills. The skill potential of more native people, disabled, visible minorities, older workers and others who have not participated as fully as they might will be required. A national campaign should be mobilized to help individuals establish personal visions of their career futures which are congruent with current and future labour force needs.

Demographics

Canada's fertility rate peaked in 1960 at around 4 children per family. In 1989 the birth rate is 1.67 children per woman and declining, while that for Quebec is 1.4. The replacement rate, allowing for adults who cannot, or will not have children, is 2.1 children per couple. In the past year approximately 150,000 people immigrated to Canada, but about 70,000 left the country. If these trends continue, Canada's population will peak between 2010 and 2015, and then decline in absolute size.

The huge baby boom generation, which spans the birth years from 1947 to 1966, dominates the Canadian demographic landscape more than in any other industrialized country. In 1989 baby boomers are aged 23 to 42. Over the 1970's the decline in fertility meant the 0-14 age group was shrinking dramatically. In fact the smallest age group in Canada in 1989 is 11 year olds, those born in 1978. The pre-schoolers in the 1970's are the youth of the 1980's, and they are in short supply. Industries are having a difficult time finding enough inexpensive, entry level workers.

There has been an increase in births in the eighties. This is because the baby boom generation are now in their prime child-bearing years. There are more pre-schoolers now than there have been for two decades. New elementary schools are being built and teachers are being hired. This bulge will pass through elementary schools within eight to ten years, moving on to junior high and high schools.

Youth unemployment (16-24 year olds) was a major concern for most of the 1980's, peaking at 20 percent in 1983. The rate for 1988 was 12.1 percent, down from 13.7 percent in 1987. The peak of the baby boom has passed through the youth age range. They are being replaced by the much smaller groups which follow them. Youth unemployment will continue to decrease, with young workers in short supply, until the elementary school students of today begin to enter the labour market at about the turn of the century.

The unemployment rate for 25-34 year olds, where the largest number of baby-boomers is to be found, is now higher than the national average. Obviously, the unemployment problem is moving with the baby boom. It is now in the late twenties age groups and gradually moving into the thirties age groups. Following this bulge are shortages. There are not enough teenagers now to do entry level jobs. Soon there will be a shortage of people in their mid-twenties, and this shortage will gradually spread over the 1990's. At the same time there are very few promotional possibilities for baby boomers.

Erosion of Earning Power

Between 1973 and 1986, young American families headed by a 20-24 year old experienced a 27.4 percent decline in income - equal to the drop in personal income during the Great Depression from 1929 to 1933. The income for all families remained constant during the same period. Given current trends, young men and women can expect to earn an average of 25 percent less throughout their lifetimes than the generation 10 years earlier.

As a result, most young families are working more to take home less. Over 50 percent of mothers with children under six and nearly 70 percent of mothers with children between the ages of 6 and 17 are working, or looking for work. Families headed by females aged 24 or younger lost 32.4 percent of their real median income from 1973-86.

Earnings are highly correlated with years of schooling. Young males with less than a high school diploma took a 42 percent cut (measured in 1986 dollars) in their annual earnings between 1973 and 1986, and high school graduates earned 28.2 percent less. The income of college graduates remained stable in real terms. In 1985, the average income of Canadian men aged 15 and over was $30,000. However, men with a bachelor's degree earned an average of $40,800, those with a master's earned $46,700, and men with a doctorate had an average income of $52,000.

Students enrolled in post-secondary institutions can expect a combined public and private subsidy in excess of $5,000 per academic year, totalling $10,000 to $20,000 or more per student, while young people not going to college receive almost nothing in support of their education and training needs.

The School-to-Work Transition

The majority of Canadian students in the eighth and ninth grades have no career goals. Yet they must make difficult decisions regarding the courses they will pursue at high school, decisions which directly impact their career options. Thirty percent of high school students nationally drop out of school before graduation, many because they lack career goals for which their school courses have perceived relevance.

Only thirty-five percent of youth nationally pursue post-secondary studies. The majority will not graduate. Many of those who do possess the academic wherewithal and motivation to complete post-secondary studies defer career decisions. They are in educational programs not in pursuit of specific career goals, but because they believe that a post-secondary education will assure success in whatever career they choose. The majority of university graduates are not in occupations directly related to their majors five years after graduating.

Many school leavers, both dropouts and graduates, have trouble finding jobs they truly enjoy. The median duration of first job holding is less than a year. Many quit voluntarily because, "It wasn't what I expected, and it isn't what I want to do for the rest of my life." They go on to other jobs, often after jobless periods when they receive unemployment insurance, welfare or other social assistance benefits. Many hold several jobs during their first ten years in the labour market. Of the youth surveyed by the Canadian Youth Foundation in 1988, 77 percent said they found their present jobs through personal contacts or their own initiative, while 7 percent accredited their current jobs to employment centres.

Most young adults "stabilize" in a given occupation in their mid to late twenties. For too many it is because mortgage or rent payments and domestic responsibilities restrict their freedom to continue searching for a job they truly like. The polls indicate that the majority find themselves in what they perceive to be a "rut," one in which many will spend a large part of their careers.

Cost of Career Indecisiveness

It costs, on average, more than $25,000 to recruit, select and train an employee to full productivity. The cost is higher for aircraft pilots, physicians, engineers and senior administrators, and lower for short order cooks and general labourers. As young people move through a succession of trial jobs in search of their niche in the labour force, it only takes forty people changing jobs once to add up to $1 million in lost recruiting and training investments. Even in very small communities these costs can be substantial. Of the over 3 million people who change jobs each year in Canada, more than one in ten are leaving under the circumstances described. That adds up to a conservative $7.5 billion lost by Canadian employers each year.

It's no wonder employers are reluctant to hire young people who aren't sure about their career goals. A common view is that employers can afford this inevitable risk of doing business. However, consumers ultimately pay the bill, which is passed on in the prices of the goods and services. This represents a major competitive disadvantage for Canadian companies competing with foreign producers in both the domestic and international markets.
Consider the cost of unemployment insurance payments to people between jobs as they "browse" in the labour market. The cost of U.I. payments, just to those 24 years of age and younger in Canada for fiscal 1987/88 was $2.4 billion. That is $10 million every working day of the year, or over one million, two hundred and fifty thousand dollars every working hour. It's a high price for Canadian taxpayers to pay to support young people trying to find jobs they can commit themselves to, for the most part unassisted. All too often they are unsuccessful. Many will be unemployed and receiving support payments again before long when they will leave their next jobs for similar reasons.

Voluntary dropouts from government sponsored training programs, those trainees who have the ability to complete the course but drop out two to three weeks into the course because it isn't what they thought it would be, are also expensive. That cost in the past year in Canada was about $300 million, between fifteen and twenty percent of a total (federal only) national training program budget of $1.6 billion. Taxpayers again pay the bill because individuals trying to establish new career directions cannot make the right decisions.

Other costs, while harder to quantify, may place a greater burden on both individuals and the Canadian economy. The personal cost, for example, of encountering one failure after another in trying to find a satisfying job. Consider the impact on people's physical and emotional health (and indirectly that of their families) of spending fifty percent of their conscious hours, month after month, in working environments they dislike. By the end of a day's work many have little energy left for their families and communities, let alone for pursuing opportunities for personal growth and self-fulfillment.

Lost productivity is no doubt the greatest economic cost of inappropriate career decisions. It seems reasonable to assume that many Canadians would agree with the ninety percent of American workers in the Gallup Poll cited earlier who felt they could be more productive than they are in their current jobs. Canada's overall productivity increases last year were lower than the U.S. In fact, they were the lowest among the seven major OECD countries. A one percent increase in productivity across Canada would result in an increase in the order of $5 billion in goods and services produced by Canada in a single year. A seven percent increase would pay off the national deficit in less than a year. If more workers believed they were in the right jobs, many would be both more satisfied and productive.

Career Planning Services

In a national consultation financed by the Innovations Fund of Employment and Immigration's Canadian Jobs Strategy, Canadian Youth Foundation researchers visited thirty-seven towns and cities across Canada in 1987 and 1988. In speaking with thousands of young Canadians they learned that lack of career information concerns them more than anything else. High school students across the country said that the amount and content of career planning assistance they receive in school is falling far short of their needs. Moreover, sixty percent of 15 to 24 year old youth have little confidence in guidance counsellors, and less than one percent of youth surveyed would turn to a guidance counsellor for help with a situation involving a moral question.

Counsellors cannot satisfy the needs of students alone. They face a growing array of crisis counselling situations, academic advising, course scheduling and administrative tasks. However, students can be assisted in career planning by coordinated teams of administrators, teachers, teacher-aides, paraprofessionals, parents, peer helpers, clerical staff, volunteers, community agency staff and others. These teams can also deal with issues like promotion of career planning in the school, career infusion in the classroom, planning and coordinating career days, community liaison for work experience and job shadowing programs, and more. They may expand to include school board members, student council members, media people, the PTA, Chamber of Commerce, Jaycees, service clubs, church groups, YM/YWCA, scouts and guides, big brothers/sisters, government agencies, post-secondary institutions, labour unions, professional associations and other organizations.

New Vision

A new vision is required, one which sees career planning as a community responsibility, rather than just an educational, or worse, a counsellor responsibility. More attention must be paid to the career-related developmental needs of clients across the full spectrum of community service agencies. The traditional focus of vocational guidance has been on the provision of occupational and educational information. Booklets, monographs, institutional calendars, co-op and work experience programmes, video materials, computer software, speakers, career fairs and many other media are used to provide information to assist people trying to plan their careers. They need more than information.

People must be taught how locate and process information which has personal relevance. The average person can name fewer than one hundred occupations. There are thousand of occupations, and millions of jobs in Canada's increasingly complex and rapidly changing labour force. Researching career alternatives from among the same pool of stereotypical options with which most people begin their selection processes is doing themselves, and for that matter their families and their communities, an injustice.

Their is no "quick fix" for career planners. The insights which will lead to personal career visions must come from within, not from quickly administered assessment instruments. A process of thoughtful self-analysis is required before any research on career goals can have real relevance, and, for that matter, before users truly buy into the alternatives their research uncovers. Many people, perhaps most, go through their entire careers defaulting on opportunities to make good career decisions. Young people and adults need to be taught basic skills they can use over and over again in evaluating their needs, identifying alternatives and choosing career options which satisfy as many as possible of their needs and aspirations. The old proverb, "Give people fish and they will feed themselves for a day. Teach them to fish and they will feed themselves for the rest of their lives," is most appropriate in this context.

People must remain free to make their own choices. But freedom is limited by knowledge of one's needs and options, and brings with it the responsibility to take charge of one's destiny. Only the individual career seeker can identify his or her best prospects from among the myriad of alternatives, and only on the basis of self-knowledge. Though most people know little about the world of work, each is the world's foremost authority on him or herself, however confused or unsure he or she may be. We must assist people in connecting personal insights regarding their needs and priorities to career options which reflect current and future labour market realities. All workers will face many decision points during the course of their careers. They must be equipped with the basic knowledge and skills they need to make the best possible choices, with or without assistance.

Community Strategies

All young people are personally concerned about their career futures. Most adults are concerned about their careers, and those of their spouses and children. The career planning theme is one to which everyone in the community can relate. By defining its benefits in terms of specific economic impacts, career planning can become a community rallying cry like curbing impaired driving, re-cycling waste, reducing break-ins and vandalism, etc.

Individuals with a sense of purpose derived from satisfying visions of their futures are less likely to accept low achievement, to drop out of school, or to jeopardize the attainment of their goals by associating with those who may obstruct their success. They are more likely to be physically fit and healthy. People with jobs in which they feel fulfilled and appreciated are more productive. They do not resent having to spend fifty percent of their conscious hours in jobs they dislike. They are less likely to seek escape from the unpleasantness of their daily routines in substance abuse. They feel less need to punish those who live with them for their personal unhappiness.

Community goals can be established and monitored by local media, like targeting a one percent:

- annual reduction in school dropout rates
- increase in student achievement rates
- increase in productivity of area firms
- reduction in social assistance or welfare payments
- increase in co-op, work experience, job-shadowing
- decrease in unemployment
- decrease in substance abuse
- decrease in return rates of the incarcerated
- decrease in medical expenditures

A one percent change in any of these areas can dramatically impact local economies. Positive change in several areas will result in more satisfied citizens, and many millions of new dollars becoming available to the community.

Career development initiatives in all community agencies need to be part of a coordinated community career development strategy involving cooperation and collaboration among the many educational and other agencies in every community concerned with assisting people with career-related issues. Only vision and leadership are required to make this happen. As the economic consequences of continuing to neglect the career development needs of citizens become more clearly understood, they are increasingly viewed as unnecessary and intolerable.

A great many agencies, including government, private industry, labour and community organizations, influence the career plans of individuals. A partial list follows:

Federal Government:

Employment and Immigration
Labour
Statistics Canada
National Defence
Health and Welfare
Correctional Service
Industry, Science and Technology
Indian and Northern Affairs
Public Service Commission

Provincial Governments:

Education
Skills/Career Development/Apprenticeship
Advanced Education (Colleges and Universities)
Correctional Services
Labour/Workers' Compensation
Community and Social Services
Industry, Trade and Technology
Health

Community Organizations:

Employers
Post/Secondary Institutions
Trade Unions
Professional Associations
Chamber of Commerce
Board of Trade
Parent-Teacher Association
Jaycees/Junior Achievement
YM/YWCA
Churches
Service Clubs
Cubs/Scouts
Brownies/Guides
Big Brothers/Sisters
Recreational/Athletic Associations

Conclusion

Career planning is the most critical ingredient in developing the nation's primary resource. The challenge of providing adequate career planning assistance for all citizens is enormous. It goes far beyond the school system, which has traditionally borne the burden of helping students plan their careers. Adults now require career planning assistance in larger numbers than youth. Those communities with the vision to launch coordinated initiatives that pool the knowledge and resources of all levels of government, private industry, labour and service organizations to help their citizens plan their own bright futures, will assure even brighter futures for the community at large.

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